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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2307
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 3899
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 6979
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 9781
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ SEP QUITO 0685
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0848
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: GOP TEMPORARILY HALTS ERADICATION AFTER COCALERO
PROVOKED CONFRONTATION

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On 9/11 some 300 cocaleros attacked police officers protecting coca eradicators in San Martin. Two police officers were injured in the scuffle, one with shotgun wounds, as were a number of protesters. A group of doctors, a prosecutor, and cocalero Congresswoman Nancy Obregon flew to the scene to investigate. Obregon publicly (mis)characterized the event as "police brutality." The Prime Minister, who two weeks ago initiated a dialog with cocalero leaders including Obregon, called for a temporary halt to eradication operations. Eradication operations are expected to resume. NAS will continue to support GOP eradication operations in less conflictive areas through the November elections. Programmed eradication is at 9,000 hectares. End Summary.

¶2. (U) After months of peaceful eradication, on 9/11 300 cocaleros attacked 105 national police (PNP) protecting 199 coca eradicators (CORAH) in Sion, San Martin department. The police restored control after 30 minutes, and eradication continued. Protesters slung rocks and fired shotguns at the eradication team. Cocalero demonstrators injured two police, one with gunshot wounds; both are now in stable condition.

¶3. (SBU) Union Por el Peru (UPP) pro-coca congresswoman Nancy Obregon of San Martin falsely portrayed the cocalero-provoked confrontation as police brutality and claimed 30 protesters were injured by the police, including with gunshot wounds. (Note: Ongoing investigations indicate the police fired teargas and not rifles. The investigative team reported bruises and contusions among a few cocaleros. Most media reports have disseminated Obregon's inflated numbers and mischaracterizations. End Note.) On 9/12 a delegation that included Obregon and pro-coca Andean Parliament member Elsa Malpartida, regional police leaders, a prosecutor, and 3 doctors visited the site. According to CORAH reports, upon arrival the police commander and Obregon informed the eradicators that Prime Minister Jorge Del Castillo had ordered the suspension of eradication, which CORAH respected. Vice Minister of Interior Dardo Lopez Dolz told NAS Director that eradication would resume on after weekend consultations on procedures; subsequent conversations with the GOP confirm that eradication will resume but with no definite timetable. (Note: PM del Castillo began a dialogue with cocalero leaders including Obregon on 9/1. The next meeting is scheduled for

9/17. End Note.)

¶4. (U) Recently named Executive Director of the national anti-drug commission (DEVIDA) Romulo Pizarro told press on 9/13 that eradication would continue. Minister of Interior Pilar Mazzetti was called to the Defense and Counternarcotics Congressional Committee to answer questions about the incident. Mazzetti said she would investigate if there were abuses, but believed police actions were within the law.

¶5. Comment: The confrontation was not significant in comparison to past protests, particularly those before June 2005 when a new cadre of police trained in NAS-supported academies began protecting eradicators. The GOP decision to halt eradication underscores the absence of either a clear coca policy or a strategy to deal with cocaleros. It also suggests a paramount interest in avoiding social conflict before the November elections. Obregon knows this and is stirring up cocalero protests by threatening to pull out of the dialog unless eradication is stopped. When eradication resumes next week, we expect to target more remote areas of San Martin.

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